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SIPDIS

NEA/PD FOR FRANK FINVER

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT'S CONDOLENCE VISIT TO EGYPTIAN EMBASSY
HITS TOP TV NEWS SLOT AND FRONT PAGES OF LOCAL PRESS;
SECRETARY RICE'S SIGNING GETS PROMINENT COVERAGE

SIPDIS

REF: CAIRO 5652

1. Summary: Egyptian state-run TV ran President Bush's July 25 signing of the condolence book at the Egyptian Embassy as the top news item, while local press made it the main front-page story with a photo on July 26. Egyptian press and TV also prominently carried Secretary Rice's July 26 signing of the condolence book and her remarks expressing solidarity and support for Egypt. The Information Minister and PA media contacts praised the President and Secretary's gestures, which they said would have a powerful impact and underline American-Egyptian friendship in a time of crisis. End summary.

2. The Egyptian media gave extensive coverage to the July 25 visit of President Bush to the Egyptian Embassy in Washington, during which he signed a condolence book in the presence of the First Lady and Egyptian Ambassador to the U.S. Nabil Fahmy. The front-page of leading pro-government newspaper Al-Ahram printed a large photo of the President signing the condolence book, flanked by the First Lady and Ambassador Fahmy. A smaller front-page photo ran on pro-government Al-Akhbar. The same image was replayed to voiced-over coverage on Egyptian TV of the President's visit throughout July 25, 26, and 27. Secretary Rice's signing of the same condolence book on July 26 was also given top-of-the-TV news coverage and prominent mention in the pro-government press. FM Aboul Gheit was quoted in all newspapers on July 27 as saying the visits were "big support for Egypt in its war against terrorism." (Note: This coverage was in addition to reporting on U.S. and Embassy statements and condemnation and condolences previously in the week (reftel). End note.)

3. In a conversation with the Charge, Information Minister Anas El-Fekki praised the President's signing of the condolence book as an excellent signal to the Egyptian people. One PA contact, echoing the remarks of several others, commented that the President's visit to the Egyptian Embassy was "a positive public diplomacy move." The contacts noted that having the First Lady visit the Egyptian Embassy along with the President enhanced the positive image the visit sent to Egyptians. PA contacts also praised the U.S. for immediately condemning the attacks and, especially, the President and Secretary for their July 23 statements that the U.S. would stand with Egypt. The new Editor-in-chief of weekly magazine Al-Ahram Al-Arabi, Mohamed Abdel Atti, suggested on July 26 that the visits to the Egyptian Embassy would help to smooth over "recently tense relations" between Egypt and the U.S.

JONES